

Oral History Cover Sheet



Name: Russ Earnest

Date of Interview: October 22, 2014

Location of Interview: National Conservation Training Center,
Shepherdstown, WV

Interviewer: Denny Holland

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 28 +

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: Denver Wildlife Research Center; Fish Pesticide biologist in Columbia, Missouri; Fish Pesticide Research Facility in Tiburon, California; Office of River Basin Studies in Sacramento, California; Field Supervisor in Laguna Niguel, Ca Ecological Services in California; worked at Regional Offices in Boston, Massachusetts, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Area Manager Jackson, Mississippi; Washington; Deputy Regional Director, Albuquerque, New Mexico; Washington involving Ecological Services.

Most Important Projects: Assistant Secretary Nat Reed's team in Ecological Services identifying field offices across the country.

Colleagues and Mentors: Oliver Cope, Mike Spear, Ken Black, Lynn Greenwalt, Dennis Holland, Jerry Stegman, Cathy Griegos, Marge Kolar, Nancy Kaufman, Nevin Holmberg, Marvin Moriarty

Brief Summary of Interview: Mr. Earnest grew up in California, went into the Navy after high school, and then got his undergraduate and graduate degrees at Oregon State, where he met his wife Corinne. He shares several stories from showing the Secretary of Interior James Watt wetland inventories, to a meeting in Senator Byrd's office, to hearing a story about a fist fight at Ranch A, and many more. He credits his family, without whose support, nothing would have been accomplished. He also acknowledges the unsung heroes, such as the Realty folks who are always behind the scenes and without whom things would never have been accomplished. And if those reading this were to take anything from this transcript, it would be 'save the dirt.'

DENNY: I'm at NCTC with Russell Earnest, Russell David Earnest; retiree from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, now a resident of Clayton, Delaware. Today is October 22; it's 3 o'clock in the afternoon. And we want to talk a little bit about Russ's career, first of all starting off with your life story. You were born and raised in California, educated at...

RUSS: Oregon State, got a bachelor's and master's there. Went to work for Arizona Game and Fish; well, after high school, served a tour in the Navy.

DENNY: And you were in submarines...

RUSS: Submarines.

DENNY: ...of all things. You look pretty tall for the submarines.

RUSS: Yeah, I banged my head a few times, that's for sure. But the hazardous duty pay helped get me through college. I unfortunately was in the Service at a time they did not have veterans' benefits, and they passed it retroactive after I was through school; that's the way life went sometimes. But I went out to Oregon State and in graduate school is when I met my wife of over 50 years now, Corinne. I think it goes without saying, through the rest of the discussion here, that nothing would have been accomplished without support of Corinne and my two kids, Patricia and Russell, because of all the moves that we went through, which were, we'll get to that in a second. The next thing I wanted to mention was that the story of

whatever I tell you is only because of the folks I worked with, and I imagined a lot of people that are interviewed are closely associated, talked about their fellow employees at the field level. When I worked in the field, at the Regional Office, and in the Central Office, and without exception, they're good folks from as far as you want to go, to the hallowed halls of the Interior building; there's still good people there in spite of what you hear about Washington and I think that's true to this day, in all divisions too. There're some unsung heroes out there that never get the kind of visibility they should. I would mention in particular, Realty folks; they played a major role in terms of what we accomplished out there and yet hardly ever anybody says anything about the role they played. And the last thing I want to say is "Save the dirt!" Without habitat, it doesn't matter about anything else, if we can't save the dirt, then the rest of it is just about meaningless; we don't want everything in zoos. And eventually if you follow it through, the thought process here, that includes us humans, 'so save the dirt.'

DENNY: Save the dirt.

RUSS: I went to work, out of school, I went to work for Arizona Game and Fish and worked there only one year in Phoenix and Kingman, Arizona, and went to the Denver Wildlife Research Center in 1967, went to work for Olli Cope in the fish pesticide lab that was part of the Wildlife Research Center. At that time, a lab was being built in Columbia, Missouri, for fish pesticide

research and we transferred from Denver to Columbia. I was in Columbia as a fish pesticide biologist for, probably not even two years, because I was sent to California as the Project Leader for the Fish Pesticide facility, a small lab at Tiburon, California. And then in, and throughout here don't hold me to the years that I mention because I don't remember very well anymore and I didn't, to keep this unstaged, I didn't go back and review my notes and stuff. But about 1970, there's a re-organization where the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife was separated from the National Marine Fisheries Service, which had been BCF before that. And the lab I was at went to the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, or NMFS it became, and I wanted to stay with Fish and Wildlife Service. So I transferred from research to the Office of River Basin Studies in Sacramento. And I moved up to Sacramento, or we moved to Sacramento and then got picked up on the Departmental Training Program in '71/'72, I was supposed to be on; I think it was supposed to be a one-year program, but after I finished the program, got sent back to Washington to work on a study put together by Nat Reed, the Assistant Secretary of the Interior, who brought a large amount of money into the Service to establish the Ecological Services field offices and expand that program, identifying field offices across the country, which needed to be established. I worked with Larry Shanks and some Region 4 people. And then I went back to Sacramento, but then was reassigned to Ecological Services, a

new office in southern California. And was there only about a year and a half when I was picked up for, I forget the terminology and titles now, but a Deputy Regional supervisor in the Boston Regional Office. And from Boston went to Albuquerque in the same position. From Albuquerque went to Jackson, Mississippi as Area Manager where I crossed paths with Denny Holland, Ray Aycock, Steve Gard...

DENNY: Bob Misso.

RUSS: Bob Misso, Dennis Jerdan, Jim, fish head, what was his, in Fisheries; I can't remember his last name.

DENNY: Stewart.

RUSS: Stewart, Jim Stewart, Virginia Stubblefield.

DENNIS: Stubbs.

RUSS: Stubbs, and just a great collection of characters, but we got the job done. And from there I went back to Washington in some kind of position and then to Albuquerque as Deputy Regional Director and then back to Washington where I wrapped things up, again, with another title but involved more with endangered species at that time. And that was my career path and then the Service was going to send me to a place that I had to make a decision about whether I wanted to go there or retire, and I chose retirement because I had a job waiting for me working with my wife and her very focused writing/publishing business, and have been doing that for almost 20 years now.

And it was a good move because one of the things, and Denny and I talked about this and others, that we just didn't want to be a sour old men that should have retired years ago, but we know the time's right and the time was right for me and so I had a career change. And I don't look back, but what I miss is the people; there's not a day goes by, and I can say it's almost been 20 years, I don't think about Fish and Wildlife Service every day in some facet or another. And primarily people I worked with, but also some of the water projects and land acquisitions I was involved in to know whether or not what the status of them is 20 years later. And I've got some stories to tell and that's why...

DENNY: I would hope so.

RUSS: If the camera is working, I want to show this rope. It was...

DENNY: It's working.

RUSS: ...in Jackson, Mississippi, we had a meeting with the Corps of Engineers, the District Engineer. And going to the meeting, my belt broke. I didn't tell the guys this because they would blame it on other things other than the fact the buckle broke right out of the belt when I went into the office. And I was dressed up so I could button my coat and cover up the fact that I didn't have a belt on. But somebody in the office noticed that I was beltless and so I went to the meeting with the Corps of Engineers. The Colonel in charge of the Vicksburg District, I only saw this once in many years of working with the

Corps of Engineers, he had his own personal valet and when you would have a meeting with them, his valet would come in and serve him tea out of a silver tea set, which I felt was absolutely ridiculous and, of course, never offered the tea to anybody else. The first time I met him was when I didn't have a belt. Later on the guys in the Vicksburg Field Office gave me a gift, and it's kind of like, if any of you have seen James Dean playing with his rope; I'll sit here and play with this rope, 'cause this is the belt they presented me. And one of the presenters was Steve Forsythe and the others, I'm sorry I can't pull out of the air right now, but one of the participants was some guy named Dale Hall. I think some of you probably know Dale Hall's name.

DENNY: We have run across that name a few times in the past.

RUSS: So anyway, this rope probably in terms of mementos I've picked up through the years, means more to me simply because I could identify it with the real high thinking, quality people we have out there in the field in terms of our dress code and, of course, they didn't want the Area Manager to look shabby.

DENNY: Especially if his pants fall off.

RUSS: But [unintelligible]...

DENNY: But might embarrass the Colonel.

RUSS: They put a lot of money into this, so this is one of my favorite mementos. Going back through the

years, I use the 'me and I,' simply because I'm talking, but it's always 'we.' Some of my favorite things I got involved with were, we had a Secretary of Interior named James Watt. And I was in the Central Office at the time, and a phone call came down; the Secretary wanted a briefing on the wetlands inventory, right now. And Bill Wilen, who was wetlands inventory guru, had picked of all times to be, I think, he was in Europe. And we said "Our wetlands inventory expert is not here, could you wait?" And they called back, and said, "He wants the briefing right now, come on and give him the briefing." So that was me. So I grabbed some wetland inventory maps, not having a clue to what area he might be looking at; I don't remember which ones I took up there. But Watt was an interesting guy, he has this huge office for the Secretary of Interior, but he didn't use it. There was a little office off to the side and that was the office he used, so I went into this little office and there was enough room for a desk and one little table. So we spread the maps out, showed him the scale on the maps, gave him an idea of how to use it and I don't even remember what areas I picked because it was such quick notice, it was kind of like, "he wants it now." And so we went over some wetlands inventory maps and he was very friendly, I give him credit for that; this is before he went to prison. And anyway I left; I felt that went pretty well. About two days later they call down, the Secretary wants to talk to you, it's another briefing on wetlands inventory right now but he wants these

particular maps. And I think they were western maps as I recall, but they were focused the second time around. And so up I went, and with interest, he had his wife with him. And we used the big room and there was a bunch of people, I don't know who they were, standing around the edge of the room, but we spread the maps out on the floor of the Secretary's Office. And he and his wife and I crawled around on the maps and he'd say, "What's this symbol mean? Where's this?" To figure it out we had to push maps together. And so there was the three of us, butts in the air, crawling around on the Secretary's floor, and she was as interested in it as he was. It went very well, as far as I know, and never got any negative feedback or anything and the Program continued to be funded. So I guess he was satisfied with it, but the whole time, of course, I was wishing Bill Wilen was there, guzzling German beer probably. But anyway, that was one of those impromptu meetings that turned okay, I guess. But I'll go to one about NCTC, the place we're sitting at here. We had a briefing with Senator Byrd's staff. Bobbie Byrd had something to do with the state of West Virginia; I mean he was Mr. West Virginia. And it was Pigeon Creek Channelization Project, a very contentious project that dragged on for years. So we went to the Senator's office, but the Senator was not involved in the meeting, it was run by his chief of staff who had been his main guy forever. And I met him several times, but never the Senator. The Soil Conservation Service had all their people there and

there was a bunch of local politicians; there was those types that on the ground want the project built, federal expense, of course, and what have you, so had a typical 'everybody beat up on the Fish and Wildlife Service' 'cause we had problems with the project. So suffered through the meeting and it went okay, typical thing and got beat up a little, but we held our own. And there was one fellow from the field office there, as I recall, I'm pretty sure there was, and because I remember later he told me, I wish I remembered his name, but he had every reason in the world now never to go to Washington. So, but anyway, when the meeting wrapped up, everybody was filing out and when I was walking through the main door, a secretary came over to me and said, "The Senator would like to meet with you, could you hold on here a minute" I said, "Sure." I had no idea what the agenda was. When I turned around and there was the Senator standing right behind me, and I didn't know he was there, hadn't noticed but I guess his office had two doors and he'd come in the back door whenever he left. And he was very polite, I guess he always was, but he was super polite. And he said that he just had a meeting with our Director, and he called it a, not a National Training Center, nothing like that. He called it, I think, an Ecological Center, or an Ecosystem Center, or something like that. And he said, "I just had a meeting with your Director about this," and I'll use the term Ecosystem Center, that was his term. "What does the rank and file of the Fish and Wildlife Service

think about it?" He said he didn't know any Fish and Wildlife Service people that well. And I said, "It's a great idea, Senator, we just don't get this kind of opportunity very often." And he said, "I appreciate that." And he walked out with me, I remember, we walked and chatted and what have you, and he took me over to the elevator and I was gone. I didn't have a clue as to what...

DENNY: What became of it.

RUSS: ...this Ecological Center [talking at same time.] All I did was, I had a fifty percent chance of getting it right; I was either right or wrong. I remember I scurried back, I don't know if I ever told Bruce Blanchard and he may not have yet been involved. I went back and told the Director, told John that, you know, I had to pull this out of the hat and I told Byrd it was the greatest thing that ever happened. And he said, "Well, it was the right answer." But I didn't have a clue. So the place eventually got built and as I look around, I'm very pleased with what got done. I also remember when the Service had two Director nominees, and I don't know if many people knew this. They had Bob Jantzen from Arizona, who was Ray Arnett's pick but there was a veterinarian from San Diego and luck of the draw, I knew both of them. When I worked in Arizona, I knew Bob Jantzen; he was Chief of Big Game. When I had the field office in Southern California, the veterinarian was leading the effort for protecting Southern California wetlands, so I worked with him. But as far as I know it's the only time in the

Service's history when we briefed the Director nominees for their hearings, we briefed two of them. And what we would do is one got one office at the end of Peacock Alley, they kicked the Deputy Director out and the other one took that office. And so we carried our charts and stuff down, brief one and leave that office and go and brief the other one. And Bob Jantzen won because he was Ray Arnett's buddy, but at the time, again my timing is fuzzy on this and I only thought about it driving over here. But we had three Deputy Directors for a while, and that got really confusing. And I think it's when Bill Clinton's administration came in. They had either Hester, no, he wouldn't have been here still, so it was Dick Smith probably and Bruce Blanchard, and the fellow they brought in from Arkansas and I don't remember his name.

DENNY: I don't either.

RUSS: A nice guy. And so we had to figure out how to work with three Deputies. Bruce Blanchard was from the Department; he was born in the Department by the way, he spent his whole career there, probably died there as far as I know too.

DENNY: In a pigeon hole probably.

RUSS: Probably still down there. Anyway, they gave Bruce the Training Center. I think as something meaty, something to get his teeth into, but also in terms of probably trying...

DENNY: Get him out of the way.

RUSS: ...well, that, and funding for the facility, maybe, because he knew everybody in the Interior building and some of those guys, I can't think of his name, but we just had had the retirement party for the one guy in the Department, spent 50 years; 50 years in the budget side of things. And I should know his name, I can't think of it, but he was a very nice fellow to work with, worked on and off with him for years. But anyway the Service had three Deputy Directors for a while and that was confusing, which leads me to one other thing about Republicans versus Democrats. And I'll be interested to see if this holds true in the future, but it was much easier being a staffer in Washington when a Republican administration came in because they came with an agenda. They came with a program; they knew what they wanted to do. The Reagan people, for example, who I knew some of them because they came out of California with Ray Arnett, even had specific names on their agendas in terms of what they wanted to accomplish, who they wanted to move and what have you; very specific. Whereas when the Democrats came to town, there was confusion because, we called them the '20-year-old-know-nothings' that they brought in; their first priority was to get an office as close to the Director as possible. And they'd outdo each other in terms of who got the best office space, and they didn't have any duties assigned. So they'd set up their offices and we'd try to figure who we're supposed to work with, who do we work through, and what have you. And it

was almost, of the administrations I worked with, was like that continuously; I don't think there was ever a Democratic administration that came in where they were organized and seemed to have a program worked out well ahead of time. When I was in Southern California, when we were in Southern California, the wetlands down there were greatly stressed; now there's a drought going on down there so probably haven't even come close to seeing what stress is. But we tried to fill in the green, which is a term which Mike Spear; by the way, I worked with two of the best people, in Ken Black and Mike Spear, the Service has ever produced, and some of the finest Directors the Service has ever had with Lynn Greenwalt and John Turner that come to mind immediately that I really admire. Mike wanted to fill in the green on the Gulf Coast, years earlier we wanted to do that in Southern California. However, the Regional Office Refuge staff was not with the program, which led to some awkward situations. We were working with locals down there trying to set up to establish, eventually buy some of the areas, like in the case, for example, Seal Beach Naval Weapons Station. We had talked to, now this is "we" Ecological Services, had talked to the Navy about a role there to protect it, because the Navy was under pressure to sell it to developers. And we thought well, if you go there, you're going to look at these housing developments that look as far as the eye can see and you have these little bitty areas of shorebirds, plovers, brant, and what have you, that you don't see any place else down there,

a place called Tijuana Slough, where I saw sea turtles; I didn't even know there were sea turtles there, but we found them down in Tijuana Slough south of San Diego Bay and were trying to get together programs to protect these areas. Got a call one day, the Regional Refuge Supervisor said if we didn't back off our activities relative to wetlands in California, I was going to be fired, that was me personally. Okay, I remember after I hung up, I sit back in my chair, and I think I'm right about this, that very morning we had a meeting with the local Congressman for Seal Beach and I think his name was Barry Goldwater, Jr., and I'm pretty sure I'm right about that and the very same day I was threatened, but it got escalated later on. And I make the point that we weren't working in a vacuum, we had support from the region as well and so we weren't doing it all on our own. We had support from some elements of the Regional Office, I can appreciate where they're coming from, Refuges, because there's never enough money to do everything in Refuges that has to be done. But I'd say that if they'd known an Assistant Director from Washington had come out and visited with us on the QT on the behest of the Director and things like this, that it was treading lightly, let me put it that way. But I think in terms of the way things turned out, we did pretty well. And we were kind of ahead of the curve; this was after Earth Day but before a real implementation of the Endangered Species Act so we didn't have that clout at that time. But because of local people, some things got done. We missed the

ball on an area called Bolsa Chica and I still hope that that area was protected, but I think, as far as I know, Tijuana Slough, Sweet Water Marsh, South San Diego Bay, I think those got protected. South San Francisco Bay, I worked on that one, and we tried to get the Navy and Service together on Point Mugu but I think that area is still pretty safe because of the rocket testing they were doing out there. So that's one area we'll hopefully get someday. It's not the only time that we were involved in issues where the Regional Office didn't support us.

DENNY: I can think of several.

RUSS: Denny's sitting here chuckling, but we had some problems in Region 4 and in trying to get...

DENNY: Bogue Chitto was one.

RUSS: What are some of those, what was the generic term we used? Bottom Land Hardwoods!

DENNY: They were non-migratory waterfowl refuges basically, unique species.

RUSS: We had our terminology for it, but the Regional Office had a little problem with our program there.

DENNY: Yeah, LWCF was the basic way we got those.

RUSS: That's right. And again it goes back; I think some of those areas would never have been protected if the Realty folks and their connection to the LWCF people hadn't been as good as they were.

And so some of those things were pulled off; those areas that are protected now never would have happened otherwise.

DENNY: Yeah Mr. Lankford really had a problem with us acquiring Bogue Chitto Refuge, that was twenty some thousand acres of riverine swamp that...

RUSS: It wasn't just that area, though.

DENNY: Oh, I know.

RUSS: We added on to Felsenthal.

DENNY: Bon Secour.

RUSS: Bon Secour.

DENNY: All of the Bottomland Hardwood stuff in Mississippi as well as Louisiana; I did a little information [unintelligible] a couple days ago. And the thought came to mind during the four years that I was there, with three years with you, we put over seventy-five thousand acres under active Service management during that time frame and it was because of the push that we did with Upper Washita, Felsenthal, and you know [makes a noise]. And we had the cooperation of the states, which was another story in itself.

RUSS: That's right. But we also had Ken Black supporting us over his immediate staff, which led to some problems of his own, I imagine, but anyway we got the support. But I think without the conservation groups, it never would have happened, and without the state support, it never would have happened but it did. And all the places that I worked, I've got to say, it's

because of the people, it's because of our people.

DENNY: We've had some hard charging people down on that staff. You had Misso, who couldn't find a wall big enough or tall enough that he wouldn't fight his way over.

RUSS: Well, we had, also, Ray Aycock and Steve Gard, and everybody played a role. And we had opportunities; the timing was right for Bottomland Hardwoods, I think, but also we were not afraid to go talk to private land owners, like we'd done in California and later on did in Albuquerque when I was there. And we had, at the time I left Albuquerque the second time, we were involved in a place called Gray Ranch, a huge potential acquisition, but could never get things to come together to close the deal, but I think a private entity came in and hopefully protected that one. But also we were trying to fill in the green, as it were, on the Gulf Coast and add it to the Refuges and new areas down there. So we had plenty to do; in Oklahoma, we had acquisition there; we were trying to work on endangered species habitats.

[casual talk; break in tape]

RUSS: Okay, mentors and problems. Denny just told me to talk about mentors and problems. I had the pleasure of working with some great mentors and some real problems, classic problems. Well, let me ask Denny a question; this is one of those things that stuck in my mind for years. When the Reagan

administration came in, did Lynn hold a meeting of the employees in Washington and say that he had been, they had told him that he was going to stay on, and then it was about two weeks that he got the axe or something like that?

DENNY: He had been led to believe.

RUSS: Did he not, because in my mind I think I went to the meeting where Lynn said; I was in Washington on a detail. And I think Lynn got everybody together and said he was going to stay on, was the purpose of the meeting because there was so much scuttlebutt going on about all the changes and the new Secretary and all that stuff. And then I got to think, did I imagine that or did Lynn really do it. And I'm pretty sure Lynn actually did that.

DENNY: Lynn will not tell you that. Judy, his wife, said that Lynn had been led to believe that he would be retained under the Reagan administration. And then, of course, all of a sudden, Alan Levitt came in and says, "I was at a Secretary's Office Press Release and all the Directors were being replaced with the exception of the Park Service."

RUSS: Right, that was one of the downers of my career because we were all so supportive of Lynn and what he was doing. Another downer, to put it this way, was the Area Office in terms of implementation, whether you were for the Area Offices; again, Lynn was undercut by some of his favorite people in that effort, which was too bad. Now one could say he should have got them

on board before he did it, or he should have dropped the hammer on those that were openly opposing it, which involved at least one Area Manager I know was a close friend of Lynn's. But he was very adamant with anybody who talked to him behind Lynn's back about how big of a waste of money it was and what have you. I'm sorry the way that turned out.

DENNY: I am too.

RUSS: Now, some of the mentors that I mentioned, Ken Black, Mike Spear; I had great supervisors that I worked with, but I had great staff; I mean I can't say enough about the people that I worked with. When I went into research, the Research Directors were in kind of a group by themselves, they were all out of World War II era; Olli Cope was my direct boss. He was a full Captain in the Navy, four stripes, which is hard to get four stripes in the Navy. Another Lab Director was a full Colonel in the Army, plus they were all, I don't know what the grade was at that time, but they were 14's when we were all 5's and 7's, and a pretty elite group. But every couple of years, the Lab Directors and the Director would retreat to a place called Ranch A, and I'm not sure where Ranch A is anymore; I used to know.

DENNY: Wyoming.

RUSS: Wyoming, okay.

DENNY: Beautiful.

RUSS: Yeah, I know they retreated to Ranch A. One year at Ranch A, here's

these professorial types migrated, always wore suits and ties; I mean they slept in suits and ties, they didn't wear pajamas like normal; they stuck to the plan. At one of the Directorate meetings, one of the professorial types took a pair of scissors and cut the tie off another one. And another guy punched the guy who'd done that and then the other guy punched back and then pretty soon it was a hullabaloo, and I heard this from a number of people. And the staff that they took along was just aghast; here's this highfalutin Service Directorate duking it out and they all ended up in a big pile because they all ran together and fell over the floor, and I heard about that story so many times and, of course, it gets better with every telling. But I wanted to pass that on because maybe it's been lost now 'cause they're all dead. But here's these guys duking it out, because of somebody cutting somebody's tie off, and so it's a story worth keeping alive.

DENNY: Yeah.

RUSS: And Olli Cope was the Lab Director, and in the morning, stood at the door and kept tabs on who came to work at what time. And then he stood at the door at night to see what time they left, and he was not the only one who ran a tight ship like that. And he and I got along pretty well and I think what brought it to a head, he sent me to Ohio to an EPA Lab, it wasn't EPA at that time, it was, I forget what it was called, to learn how to make proportional diluters, by bending glass. They use electric meters for it now, but then we

had to do it by gravity flow. And I was going to buy the material to put this together and here's this GS-14/15, whatever he was, wanting to go through, when I came back with a load of plywood and glass, and glass tubing. And he wanted to go through this with me, and I guess I got a little hot; I typically didn't do that. I said, "Olli, you've got more important things to do than look over my shoulder. I didn't mispend any money, it's all plywood and tubing and glass sheets and stuff like that, and bug off." And he did and after that, we got along fine. It's just a matter, you can take so much and then he never bothered me again after that. And back to something that I'm happy I played a role in was, when I had Program Development for Fish and Wildlife for Refuges and Wildlife Resources, we had to make annual visits to the Regions to go through Regional funding and what have you. Bob Gilmore was a friend of Denny's, led the team, we went out one year and while we were down in Region 4, Bob asked me to go to DeSoto Refuge and see if I could get a sense of what they were doing with the Bertrand materials at that time. And I think it was Park Service lead, I think it was on the Refuge, but it was actually Park Service personnel, if I'm not mistaken. So I broke off from the evaluation team and went to DeSoto and spent the day there with the people and looking at what they were doing; it was very early on in the Bertrand recovery. When I had been an Area Manager, I went to Wheeler Refuge, Denny was probably with me, went to

Wheeler Refuge. They had a big program there for kids to come through and visit the refuge; Tom Atkeson was really good about that in terms of outreach. And here were their ducks, stuffed like in the 1880's where you stuffed a mount, well I guess stuffing everything in it you could, so everything was like that and it was [mimics] an overstuffed bird. And a few arrowheads in a case and that was what he had to show the kids. At Carbon Hill Hatchery, they had a little case of arrowheads and a stuffed trout maybe, and that was it. And that's what people were using for interpretation, but there had to be more to the Service story than that. So some of us got together and started, including Bob Gilmore, including Denny, Tom Olds, the idea for a Heritage Committee; setting it up for the Service. And so I took the idea of a Heritage Committee and met with Dick Smith. He said, "Absolutely not, no way. We don't need it." Dick Smith was Deputy Director; he was on the large side and intimidated most people.

DENNY: Spoke harshly quickly.

RUSS: But probably one of the best Deputy Directors we ever had in my opinion. He said, "Now get out of here." It was just probably the way he said it.

DENNY: Probably.

RUSS: Well, it must have been a couple of weeks later, Gilmore said, "Go do it again." And so I went in there and said, "Dick, it's time we did something about the Heritage Committee." And same

thing, “Get out of here; don’t show your face at the door again.” Or whatever. Well, you know, I’m not exaggerating here at all. About three weeks later probably, went back and I think Dick said “Okay” just to get rid of me, “but don’t spend any money.” And so we had our first meeting, it may have been here, I always...

DENNY: Boston, probably.

RUSS: I don’t remember.

DENNY: It wasn’t here yet.

RUSS: No, I don’t think it was here.

DENNY: No, it wasn’t here yet, but we had, while this place was being...

RUSS: Our famous mud meeting, I remember the mud meeting. We came here and I was carrying two boxes of signs and somebody else was carrying two boxes of stuff, there were no sidewalks and they had planks laid out between concrete buildings, but there was nothing in the buildings. And we waded through the mud, slipping on these boards, and we carried some stuff into one of these buildings and I don’t even know which one it was. And it must have been Lemon, maybe, “Where do we put this stuff?” And he said, “Well, put it over in the corner there for now.” This is an unpainted, still smelling of cement, mud tracked everywhere building that we had a meeting there, after we cleaned the mud off our shoes and our cuffs. But that was probably, no, we met also at the, there’s that motel down the road there before

this place was built; do you remember? They were trying to acquire the land and we met at the hotel; I don’t remember the name.

DENNY: I don’t recall the motel.

RUSS: And I think that’s when Blanchard came in and gave one of his long-winded presentations. And I’m not picking on Bruce, he was born long-winded. So, anyway, it was at a motel around here someplace and that was one of the early meetings too. But anyway, it took on a life of its own, and as I look around the Service museum, I think we had a small part of; it took the support of Lemon and other people too that were involved to put this together.

DENNY: To guide it.

RUSS: And put them, actually, “write museum on the blue prints” when they were building the place and allocated space. So it took the effort, input from a lot of folks, and glad it happened.

DENNY: I ran across a letter last week from Frank Zaremba, who was the architect, you know did the timelines...

RUSS: I vaguely remember.

DENNY: Yeah, he did a fabulous timeline of the roots of what is now FWS. Oh my God, it opened so many eyes.

RUSS: I suspect that if it hadn’t been for the committee, this probably wouldn’t have happened because I don’t know if people would have been thinking we need to allocate space for

the heritage of the Service. It would have had decorative elements, I'm sure, in the lobby, but I don't know if they would have a curatorial effort. However, there's one major shortcoming that hasn't happened yet. It's still sitting up there, there's a Japanese midget sub up in [Denny laughing], on one of our Alaskan refuges. But at least they ought to bring something from that sub.

DENNY: Era.

RUSS: Because I understand it's supposedly falling apart and the winters are not going to be kind to it, what have you. There's got to be a periscope or a binnacle or something left there that could be salvaged and brought down here. Until we have that piece of that Japanese sub here, we're coming up short.

DENNY: Well, there's a lot of stuff up here, that I have brought in, that's almost that old.

RUSS: They've got a pirogue.

DENNY: Yeah, got that pirogue over there by the bar.

RUSS: If they can do a pirogue, why can't they do the...

DENNY: And they have Bob Jones's boat, you know Sea Otter Jones boat down there, and that's a big sucker.

RUSS: We don't have any World War II...

DENNY: Bulldozers.

RUSS: Bulldozers.

DENNY: That's right.

RUSS: And need a bulldozer under a canopy and I wouldn't mind having a deuce and a half too.

DENNY: I would too, yeah, a weapons carrier.

RUSS: Yeah, we got to have something like that too. If they could have them here on the grounds so people could know what our folks had to work with.

DENNY: For the sake of the record, Refuges operated on Army surplus equipment from the early 1950's all the way through, up to and including BLHP, which occurred in the '70's.

RUSS: '70's. Well, I remember surplus equipment still operating in the '80's.

DENNY: Oh, yeah.

RUSS: So it was the heavy duty stuff that the guys depended on, and in hatcheries, not just refuges. A personal observation: the Service, when Earth Day happened and things started changing rapidly for the Service, our management was clearly not, in my humble opinion, was not ready for the change. And part of that was the people; and this goes back to Denny's question about mentors and problem children. Some of our people were just not ready for the shift in the Service in terms of what we used to do. Refuges were out there to provide hunting for people.

DENNY: That was it...

RUSS: That was the mindset of a lot of people.

DENNY: ...hunting and fishing.

RUSS: That's right. And after Earth Day, and the Clean Water Act, followed by the Endangered Species Act and other things that happened. The public learns our world changed and some of our leadership was not with the program. We had people in place and of all people that used to chat with me, Clark Bavin, who was Chief of Law Enforcement, had an office on K Street, and he had an office upstairs from our office and we had lunch periodically. And Clark was an interesting fellow, to say the least. He wasn't a career Game Warden type, he came from outside. I think he was a lawyer as I remember. But he really wanted to turn Law Enforcement into something. And one of the things he used to say over and over again was he just couldn't get the RD's to support Law Enforcement, and part of it was this mindset of going from Migratory Birds and Federal Aid, we get along with everybody, we kind of rubberstamp things and what have you to a more regulatory role. And some never made the change, and I worked with people who worked in a three-piece suit but they never made a hard decision in their whole career. And they avoided and hid sometimes in making those decisions, they just didn't have the training for it, they didn't have the stomach for it. That's my personal opinion, others can argue with me. But I ran into it with two of the Regional Directors I worked for that both have similar backgrounds and

they just did not make that transition well. And I don't need to get into specific names and things like that, but luckily we had other people in the regions, and in Washington, come along that carried the programs along in spite, but sometimes it got very embarrassing. But I had, from Olli Cope to checking you in, what time you came to work, to guys like Mike Spear and Jim Young; one of the things I miss greatly, in Albuquerque where we would strategize our problems and play devil's advocate. We were better equipped to deal with things where we knew it was going to have adverse problems and a lot of it was in the state of Texas, and dealing with them on land acquisition issues, regulations on refuges, law enforcement, Federal Aid. I'll mention John Cross, who had law enforcement for us in Albuquerque, just a super guy, and his staff to work with. And then in Jackson, we had Dave Hall down in New Orleans, who I understand just passed on.

DENNY: Just passed away a couple of months ago.

RUSS: Just a super guy. And so it's amazing when you get some of these people together, the right chemistry of what can get accomplished, and sometimes in spite of great adversity. But it's the people out there, whether it's at field level, regional level, or in the Central Office, that's the strength of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

DENNY: Yeah.

RUSS: And Denny, have you got any other questions?

DENNY: Not at this particular moment, Russ, but I do thank you very much for your plight to come in, to fight the weather all the way from Clayton, Delaware.

RUSS: Yeah. And to anybody, if this thing is actually working, "save the dirt"...

DENNY: That's right.

RUSS: ...that's the bottom line; without the habitat, it doesn't matter.

[Denny talking at end, but broken up]

[End of tape.]